DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 326 606 CE 055 032

TITLE	Labor's Role for Upgrading Literacy in the Workplace.
INSTITUTION	Indiana State AFL-CIO, Indianapolis.
SPONS AGENCY	Indiana State Dept. of Employment and Training Services, Indianapolis.
PUB DATE	90
NOTE	10p.; Attachment A, a directory of local literacy education agencies in Indiana, is not included in this document.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Basic Skills; Collective Bargaining; Cooperative Programs; Corporate Education; Educational Needs; Employer Attitudes; Employer Employee Relationship; *Labor Education; *Literacy Education; Program Development; Program Improvement; Quality of Working Life; *State Programs; Union Members; *Unions; Work Environment
IDENTIFIERS	*Indiana; *Workplace Literacy

ABSTRACT

Successful workplace literacy programs involve unions. Support for education and training has long been a part of organized labor's history. Current initiatives are an expansion of union interest and activity in this area. Many unions have negotiated significant financial resources for workplace education as a part of collective bargaining agreements. Unions and employers have realized that raising workers' basic skill levels can benefit the employer, the union, and the individual worker. Collective bargaining agreements provide financial support for workplace education while protecting the rights of individual workers. Although today's corporate climate calls for increased investments in worker education, too many employers are unwilling to invest in training of any kind. Employers are encouraged to: (1) commit the financial resources necessary to keep workers' skills current; (2) build on the existing knowledge and skills of their employees in planning workplace literacy programs; (3) involve workers and unions from the start as equal partners; and (4) integrate the educational process and the job content. Resources that can help companies and unions develop programs may be found in local school districts, state education departments, colleges and universities, nonprofit literacy groups, community-based organizations, for-profit organizations, private industry councils, and local and state libraries. (SK)

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LABOR'S ROLE FOR UPGRADING LITERACY IN THE WORKPLACE

Prepared for the Indiana Department of Employment and Training Services

By the Employment and Training Services Program Indiana State AFL-CIO

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GOAL V: RESEARCH AND PREPARE A CONCEPT PAPER ON LABOR'S ROLE IN UPGRADING LITERACY IN THE WORKPLACE

OBJECTIVE A. Define labor's role for upgrading literacy in the workplace, and identify steps to initiate labor's involvement.

Major workplace literacy plans involve unions. Evidence may be seen by examining the most frequently-cited studies and reports on workplace literacy programs. The Business Council for Effective Literacy's guide[1], or the American Society for Training and Development's recent publications[2], or the Bottom Line[3], jointly published by the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor: all of these, plus numerous articles that have appeared in a variety of journals and periodicals, point to union involved programs as the largest, oldest, most innovative, and most exemplary.

Journalists have singled out the labor movement for its leadership in this area. For example, the **New York Times** published a lengthy article titled, "Help for Workers in a Complex World," on September 6 of this year. In its review of workplace literacy activities throughout the country, the **Times** article stated:

"Outside of government, some of the most aggressive drives for worker literacy come from the trade unions, which are pressing for education benefits for members."[4]

This leadership is not new. Pushing for education and training has long been at the center of

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[1]Business Council for Effective Literacy. Job-Related Basic Skills: A Guide for Planners of Employee Programs. New York, NY: BCEL, June 1987.

[2]Carnevale, Anthony P. and Gainer, Leila J. The Learning Enterprise. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development, 1989.

[3]U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Labor. The Bottom Line: Basic Skills in the Workplace. Washington, DC: USDOE/USDOL, 1988.

[4]"Help for Workers in a Complex World," New York Times. September 6, 1989.

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organized labor's history and tradition. **Time Magazine** reported in December 1988 - in an article title "The Literacy Gap" - that "Some unions have been in the education business for decades."

Indeed, over fifty years ago, the building and construction trades unions established the first apprenticeship programs recognized by the Federal government under the Fitzgerald Act. Before that, the American Federation of Labor in 1918 was calling upon Congress to establish a Cabinet-level department that would be given the responsibility of eliminating adult illiteracy. And even earlier, many unions were actively providing English-as-a-Second-Language classes to the thousands of new workers who comprised the waves of immigration at the turn of the century.

The same **Time** article described earlier quoted Kathy Schrier, director of the AFSCME District Council 37's Education Trust Fund. She stated:

"The (literacy) problem was always there. Business is just now waking up to it."[5]

But organized labor's current leadership in worker education and training isn't merely a continuation of its earlier activities. The programs that will be defined in this paper represent an expansion of union interest and activity that is unprecedented in the history of organized labor.

For example, like those turn-of-the-century programs, unions today are providing English classes to immigrant workers, many of whom are currently in the process of gaining full citizenship status under the amnesty program started over a year ago. What's new is the scale of the program. For instance, the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor is currently operating the largest ESL (English as a Second Language) program for immigrants in the entire state of California.

Another example of a union-involved program involves the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO. They are currently engaged in a literacy program (funded by the United States Department of Education) which operates under a partnership agreement with the Wisconsin Board of Vocational, Technical and Adult Education and the Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce. The Wisconsin State AFL-CIO provides the recruitment and outreach activities to seek participants for the project. The direct services are then performed by the technical colleges. The Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce provides all-around assistance by identifying employers, resolving difficulties that arise for an employer and promotion of the program. This unique and innovative approach shows labor's effective cooperation with business and the community, and has proven to be very successful in Wisconsin. This attitude needs to be developed in Indiana. Labor <u>does</u> have a role to play in the development of successful literacy programs. Our hopes and aspirations are to see the development of a literacy program linking labor, business, vocational education, the JTPA system, and others concerned with adult literacy in the state of Indiana. We would like to address this issue by the invention of a staff position at the state AFL-CIO level, possibly funded by JTPA dollars. This facilitator would effectively coordinate with representatives of the above groups in an effort to improve the quality of Indiana's workplace literacy.

Other prominent and widely-known examples of expanded union initiatives are the programs established by unions with their employers in the manufacturing industries. Much has been written about the United Auto Workers contracts with the Big Three auto makers, which established joint education and training funds in 1982. The Communication Workers of America have a similar program with AT & T called the Alliance for Employee Growth and Development. Smaller unions such as the Bakery, Confectionery,

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[5]"The Literacy Gap," <u>Time.</u> December 19, 1988.

and Tobacco Workers have worked to establish educational programs for their members who work for Nabisco, Hershey Foods, or other employers, some prior to 1980.

The funding mechanism for these efforts is also noteworthy, for they do not rely on public funding. Instead, many unions have negotiated financial support for the educational programs under the collective bargaining agreement. So in 1982, the UAW and the major car makers agreed that for every hour worked by an employee, five cents would be set aside for a jointly-administered education and training fund. This year, that formula is closer to nineteen cents for every hour worked. That means that instead of receiving a wage increase of nineteen cents per hour, UAW members voted to defer part of a larger pay raise to maintain and expand their educational programs.

Again, it's the enormous scale of the programs which began in 1982 with the UAW that's new in the labor movement, not the mechanism by which these educational programs are funded. For decades, the building and construction trades unions have operated training programs funded through joint apprenticeship and training trusts with their contractors.

Over twenty-five years ago, the Seafarers' union established a comprehensive training and education center at Piney Point, Maryland for all their members as a joint effort with their employers. In fact, their program is so comprehensive that any member of the Seafarers' union can obtain any education or training desired -- up to a four-year college degree -- at little or no personal cost to the individual member. Even if that member does not have their high school diploma, or is a total non-reader, the Seafarers' program has the staff and the resources to prepare that individual to graduate from college - if that is his or her personal ambition. All this is possible under the joint effort of the Seafarers' union and their employers.

In the service industry, many unions have also negotiated training and educational trust funds. Nearly twenty years ago, the Hospital and Health Care Workers District 1199 in Philadelphia (now affiliated with AFSCME) established a program for health care workers. This year, with many hospitals and nursing homes scrambling to meet the new Federal law requiring nurses' aides to be licensed, that program in Philadelphia is way ahead in preparing current workers in the industry to attain the basic skills required to pass the licensing exam.

The Service Employees International Union also has a number of education and training programs for their members in health care, clerical, and building service occupations. Many activities were launched under SEIU's Life-Long Education and Development (LEAD) program started in the 1970s.

Also in the service industry, local affiliates of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union in Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C. have negotiated educational programs to prepare and upgrade their members' skills in the food and hospitality industry.

In the public sector, unions have also been able to establish educational trusts. Since 1971, AFSCME District Council 37 -- whose director was quoted earlier -- has been operating a comprehensive educational program in conjunction with the municipal government of New York City. At the union headquarters near Wall Street, union members are learning everything from basic skills to specific occupational skills that will help them on the job as well as prepare them to be better parents and citizens. Funded by the collective bargaining agreement, the union and the employer have agreed that it's in their common interest to enable, encourage, and support workers to achieve educational goals ranging from a GED to a college diploma.

As a final example of a labor union initiative in this area of worker education and training, the United Steel Workers of America negotiated a new contract with the Bethlehem Steel Corporation this past May.

Under this ratified agreement, the union and company agreed to set aside for the next four years at least $300,000 per month for a new educational program to supplement the training previously being provided to the workers. This totals over $14.4 million to support educational programs for employees of a single company.

An excerpt from this collective bargaining agreement is particularly noteworthy:

"In establishing this program, the United Steelworkers of America and Bethlehem are implementing a shared vision that workers must play a significant role in the design and development of their jobs, their training and education, and their working environment. In a world economy many changes are unforeseen and unpredictable. Corporate success, worker security and employee satisfaction all require that the workforce and individual workers be capable of reacting to change, challenge, and opportunity. This, in turn, requires ongoing training, education, and growth. Experience has shown that worker growth and development are stunted when programs are mandated from above but flourish in an atmosphere of voluntary participation in self-designed and self-directed training and education. These shared beliefs shall be the guiding principles of the United Steel Workers - Bethlehem Career Development Program."[6]

Over the last few years, Bethlehem Steel has faced numerous challenges to its economic survival. Would Bethlehem Steel have set aside $14.4 million for the kind of educational and training program just described if it weren't an organized employer, and if the Steelworkers had not pressed for and successfully negotiated for the kind of commitment and level of financial resources required?

Some of the most exciting and extensive activity in workplace literacy is in the unionized sector, where unions and their employers have found common ground and worked together on mutual interests. They have embraced the fact that raising workers' basic as well as technical skill levels -- if planned and structured properly -- can benefit the employer, the union, and the individual worker.

Unions and employers are working together to establish classes in reading, writing, and math that are only a part of a larger, more comprehensive program of upgrading, education, and training for all employees. And these extensive worker education and training programs are themselves directly tied to a broader joint union - management strategy that promotes job security and advancement.

There have been many calls for employers to make greater investments in their human resources -- their workers -- through basic skills education, training, and worker involvement programs. The report of the Commission on Workforce Quality and Labor Market Efficiency, which was issued just this past Labor Day, is merely one of several recent government studies that have made this appeal to the employers.[7]

When examining employers' responses to this appeal, it is found that most of the action is taking place where there is a collective bargaining relationship, where employees are represented by a union.

Why? Because the collective bargaining agreement provides two keys: money and structure.

First, the collective bargaining agreement provides the financial support for workplace literacy. It serves as a stable and often sizable funding source not dependent on the fluctuations of government

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[6]United Steelworkers of America. Summary: Proposed Agreement Between United Steelworkers of America and Bethlehem Steel Corporation. Pittsburgh, PA: USWA, June 1989.

[7]Commission on Workforce Quality and Labor Market Efficiency. Investing in People: A Strategy to Address America's Workforce Crisis. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 1989.

funding.

It's important to recall that these funds could have been distributed to the employees as part of a general wage increase. Instead, workers (through their unions) agreed to divert money that could have gone into their paycheck into a jointly-administered trust to support education and training activities. That shows a high level of commitment.

Second, the collective bargaining agreement provides the structure and framework for a genuine partnership to be established between an employer and its employees. The contract establishes the rules for discussing and resolving differences between managers and workers.

Workers know that literacy programs can potentially harm as well as help them. No employee will step forward to participate in a training program if revealing one's need for training might jeopardize one's job security or chances for advancement.

The collective bargaining agreement protects the rights of individual workers in regard to training and education as well as job safety, benefits, wages, and other areas. The contract and its grievance procedure have proven to be effective safeguards. Individual workers don't have to rely solely on promises by their employer that participation in a literacy program will not hurt their careers. They have their union and the contract behind them.

Unions' and workers' experience with employee assistance programs provide valuable lessons about designing and operating workplace literacy programs as well. The dangers and pitfalls --as well as the benefits -- are similar.

With stable funding and a larger framework that incorporates the educational program into the workplace, literacy programs are flourishing in the unionized sector, and are now firmly institutionalized. Thus, you find that worker education programs involving unions are not only serving the largest numbers of workers but are also experimenting with the newest learning technologies and approaches.

Today's corporate climate calls for employers to make increased investments in worker education in training. Unfortunately, these increased investments are seldom made.

The scarcity of corporate investments in employee education and training was described recently in a study by the American Society for Training Development titled The Learning Enterprise, which was also funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. This report revealed that only 10% of all workers receive any kind of formal training on the job, and that most of those that get training are "managers and technical elites." It also reported that employers spend less that 1.5% of their total payroll costs on the education and training of their employees.[8]

Employers must commit the financial resources required to keep the skills of their workers current. They must embrace the cost of ongoing worker training and education as part of the total cost of doing business.

In a recent Columbus, Ohio conference on workplace literacy skills, Ms. Rena Soifer, director of the UAW-Ford Company's Reading Academy program, explained that her organization operates on three basic principles:

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[8]Carnevale, Anthony P. and Gainer, Leila J. The Learning Enterprise. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development, 1989.

1. Build on what adult learners already know.
2. Teachers and learners are equal partners in the learning process.
3. Make the learning environment relevant and authentic in the eyes of the learner.

Ms. Soifer stated that, though her principles appear simple, they are often difficult to follow - especially in the workplace setting. Employers must support the involvement of their employees in the planning and operation of a proposed workplace literacy program. Genuine and effective worker participation is more likely to be found where a collective bargaining relationship exists.

It is essential to recognize and build on the knowledge and skills of workers in the manufacturing and other industries when you plan a workplace literacy program. Don't insult them by assuming that they are unintelligent and unskilled -- even if they need to improve their reading, writing, and math skills.

Ms. Soifer also stressed the importance of involving unions and workers from the very start of the effort, and throughout every phase of the operation, AS EQUAL PARTNERS. Organized labor is not alone in emphasizing the importance of involving workers. The American Society for Training and Development agrees.

According to ASTD, involving workers from the start is the only way that programs will succeed at all. As their study, Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want, warned:

"Sensitivity is important because the potential for misunderstanding is great. Employees need to be reassured that the [literacy program] will not result in loss of jobs. If they know what is going on and why, they are more likely to support the establishment of a training program. Without employee concurrence and cooperation, the Workplace Basics program will never leave the launching pad."[9]

Lastly, do not separate the educational process from the job content. Instead, build on the workers' intimate knowledge of their job and their employer, and the skills that they have attained through work, personal, and community activities. Ask workers to use the problem-solving, communication, and group effectiveness skills that they already possess to develop an approach to the skills gap problem that may be affecting their employer and their co-workers. Use the collective bargaining relationship to address this workplace literacy issue in the same way that other issues of mutual interest and concern have been tackled.

By involving workers as equal partners in an effort of vital importance to the economic survival and growth of the enterprise, the dignity, self-respect, and self-esteem of workers are affirmed and raised. And increased self-esteem is likely to benefit both the union as well as the employer.

To quote Samuel Gompers, from a speech he gave in 1916 to the National Education Association:

"The organized labor movement realizes that education is not an arbitrary thing that automatically ends with a certain year of life, but that it must continue throughout life if the individual is really to live and make progress...[Unions]...realize that education is an attitude toward life -- an ability to see and understand problems and to utilize information and forces for the best solution of [life's] problems."

Is it possible that Gompers' observation seventy-three years ago is even more true today? Unions must continue to establish and maintain leadership in regard to worker education and training.

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[9]Carnevale, Anthony P.; Gainer, Leila J.; and Meltzer, Ann S. Workforce Basics: The Skills Employers Want. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development, 1988.

OBJECTIVE B. Identify resources available for upgrading literacy in the workplace.

Most companies or unions do not have the internal resources necessary to develop and run their own program. They will be more likely to seek outside help in the hiring of needed staff, developing an actual curriculum and teaching approach, selecting materials appropriate to the program goals, evaluating the program's effectiveness, and operating the program.[10]

In most communities throughout the state of Indiana, there are educational provider organizations, from which a selection can be made. Generally, these are:

- Local school districts, which may administer an adult basic education program.

- State education departments, which administer adult and continuing education.

- Colleges and universities, which operate adult basic education programs, some having special expertise in job-related skills programs.

- Nonprofit literacy groups. These are voluntary organizations which recruit, train, and support volunteer tutors who give one-on-one and small group instruction in various settings.

- Community-based organizations are highly localized entities which operate under various names.

- For-profit organizations and individuals which have or are developing services to help with job-related basic skills training.

- Private Industry Councils. PICs are actively involved in this area, and may use funds from JTPA to develop cooperative job-related basic skills programs.

- Local libraries and/or State Library.

Attachment A is a list that contains directory information on agencies and organizations that provide actual instruction to adults in literacy and basic skills, by county. Where a coalition of such organizations exists to coordinate literacy activities in a county, that group is listed first. This list was provided to the ETSP by the Indiana Adult Literacy Coalition.

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[10]Business Council for Effective Literacy. Job-Related Basic Skills: A Guide for Planners of Employee Programs. New York, NY: BCEL, June 1987.

The following written sources were consulted in preparing this concept paper:

Business Council for Effective Literacy. *Job-Related Basic Skills: A Guide for Planners of Employee Programs.* New York, NY: BCEL, June 1987.

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United Steelworkers of America. *Summary: Proposed Agreement Between United Steelworkers of America and Bethlehem Steel Corporation.* Pittsburgh, PA: USWA, June 1989.

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